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TWO HEADS OF NEGRESSES

REPRESENTATIONS of negroes in Greek art both in sculpture¹ and in painting are by no means rare, ranging as they do from life-size figures to heads on the fractional currency of various cities.² Their ugliness seems to have appealed alike to sculptor, engraver, and painter, and their prophylactic³ quality to the populace throughout the Mediterranean. This, and the universal popularity of the myth of Lamia, would lead one to expect a similar abundance of representations of negresses in the arts and crafts of the Ancients, yet in point of fact only very few have come to light. I have not been able to find more than three records of a negress' head modelled in the round and two negresses on Greek vase-paintings.

Of the first, one is recorded by E. V. Stern in *Jh. Oest. Arch. I.* VII, 1904, p. 201, where he describes an incomplete terracotta head of a negress with black glaze found at Olbia. In the same paper⁴ he deals with a bronze vessel made in the form of the bust of a young girl whom he describes as a negress. A glance at the illustrations (*op. cit.* pp. 197 ff., 3 figs.) can, however, only lead one to the conclusion that such a head, such a profile, and such hair—conventionalised though it be—cannot be intended to represent a young negress. The face is essentially Slavonic in character and might belong to a Russian peasant girl of the present day. The two other negress heads are more fully described (*Bull. d. Ist.* 1866, p. 236 and 1872, p. 83, No. 36), the former being a vase excavated in Etruria modelled in the shape of two Janiform heads—the one a realistic head of a negro girl painted black, the other a head of a Greek girl slightly archaic in style and pale in colour. Above both heads is the inscription

¹ Reinach, *Rép. Sculpt.* Index, 'Nègres,' 'Esclaves.'

² *British Museum Catalogue, Italy, Etruria*, p. 15, Nos. 17–21: *Central Greece*, Delphi, p. 25, Nos. 6–9, pl. IV: *Troas, etc.*, Lesbos, p. 153, Nos. 42–45, pl. XXX, 19.

³ The prophylactic quality of negroes has been discussed by A. J. B. Wace, *B.S.A.* X, 1903–1904, pp. 107 ff.

⁴ Summary in *A.J.A.* IX, 1905, p. 215.

HOPIAΣKALOΣNAI. The latter vase was excavated at the Certosa near Bologna, and is a rhyton of Janiform shape again with the contrasted heads of a Greek girl and of an "Ethiopian woman."

The vase paintings have both been published by M. Mayer, 'Noch einmal Lamia' (*Ath. Mitt.* XVI, 1891, p. 300 ff. and pl. IX). Of these only the "Lamia" vase in the National Museum at Athens is of importance¹; and this, according to Mayer, is a portrayal, or rather a free adaptation of a scene from a contemporary² satyric comedy.

Mythology tells us of Lamia, a daughter of the royal house of Libya, the black princess of whom Zeus was enamoured and whom Hera in her jealousy first caused to devour her own children and then, turning her into a hideous creature, made her live by devouring the children of others. Folk-lore popularized her even more, and to the childhood of Greece she was the Bogey who ate up naughty children; while the modern Greeks³ still tell of her as a sea-monster⁴ who eats up the sun's rays and causes eclipses. The popular satyric⁵ comedies seem to have represented her as an evil daimon of negroid appearance who was justly tormented by the Satyrs,



FIGURE 1.—JANIFORM
OENOCHOE.

¹ The second painting of the negress Lamia (?) is figured in the above mentioned article on p. 306, being taken from a rough and ugly Boeotian vase of the fourth century B.C. The coarse and sketchy drawing is not without a certain repulsive realism.

² On stylistic grounds Mayer assigns the vase—a lecythus, H. 0.315 m., B. F. on white ground—to the first half or middle of the fifth century. The painting shows a nude negress of hideous appearance bound to a palm-tree and tormented by Satyrs.

³ Roscher, *Lexikon*, s. v. 'Lamia,' II, 1821.

⁴ The ancient myths call her the mother of Scylla, which explains her position as a sea-monster. Roscher, *loc. cit.*

⁵ Daremberg Saglio, s. v. 'Lamia,' p. 908. Cf. references to her, Aristoph. *Vesp.* 1177, etc.

the followers of the good god Dionysus; and, though the comedies are lost to us, Mayer is probably right in recognizing such a scene on the lecythus of the Athenian National Museum.

The rarity of negress types has lead me to the conclusion that

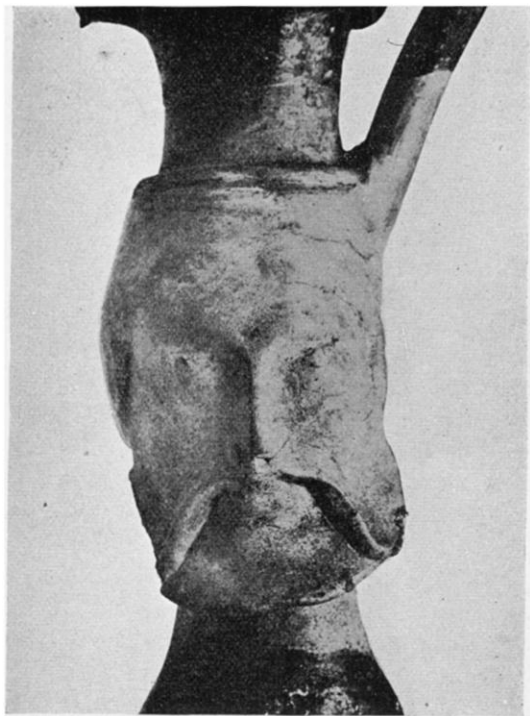


FIGURE 2.—MALE HEAD FROM OENOCHOE.

it may be worth describing two representations of negresses—hitherto unpublished—in my possession.

1. Oenochoë (Figs. 1, 2, 3); H. 7.1"; the body is the natural terracotta colour and modelled to represent two heads back to back,¹ the one a male head (Fig. 2) with thin finely shaped nose, protruding beard and long moustaches; the other a hideous head

¹ In addition to the Janiform heads—negresses and Greek girls—cited above, compare a vase of similar style and period to ours in the British Museum, E. 786 (*Guide Grk. and Ro. Antiq.* 1908, fig. 93), a fifth century rhyton with heads of a satyr and a maenad.

of a negress (Fig. 3) with high cheek-bones, broad flat nose, large mouth with very thick lips between which appears a row of big teeth; she seems to wear a thick close-fitting cap which merges at the sides into the hair of the male head. The foot is long and thick; the neck thick and crowned by a trefoil lip. The black colour



FIGURE 3.—HEAD OF NEGRESS FROM OENOCHOE.

remains around the foot, on the neck, and on the handle. Traces of red painting remain around the neck—below the black band—on the throat of the male head below his beard, and on his lower lip. Traces of black remain on his moustache and on the nose of the negress.

Though its provenance is unknown to me the fabric of this oenochœ leads one to suppose that it is Attic, and from the style of the male head it must be placed in the first half of the fifth century B.C. Nor does the presence of the negress' head quarrel

with this dating, for representations of negroes were made at Athens as early as 500 B.C.¹

It is the characteristic of many Janiform representations to portray either the two contrasting aspects of a single being, as in the case of Dionysus bearded and beardless on coins of Tenedos,² or of Boreas with dark face and light face on the R. F. vase published by Stephani³; or such representations may portray two contrasting beings welded—often humourously—into one. Our vase obviously belongs to the latter class; the male head is clearly a fine example of the bearded Dionysus, the kindest and most genial of the gods; and what better contrast to him could be found than the children's Bogey, the hideous big-toothed negress Lamia, whom we have already seen in the popular satyric comedies punished by the followers of Dionysus himself? Since there was an African Dionysus, son of Ammon,⁵ worshipped at least as early as the fifth century B.C., this combination of the African monster Lamia with Dionysus is particularly apt.

2. Grey banded agate carved in the round (Fig. 4); Ht. 1.25'', representing three negroid busts back to back. The black portion of the stone is reserved for the head of a negress whose features, though true to life, are not exaggerated; a white band in the stone—shaped like an elongated horseshoe—is cleverly adapted to form the edging of a veil, carved in a grey section of the stone, draped over her head and across her chest. The second head is that of a middle-aged negro; he has tightly curling

¹ Cf. the fine vase in the shape of a negro's head published in 'Εφ. 'Αρχ. 1894, pp. 127 ff., pl. 6. For other vases of similar shape compare *B. M. Vases* IV, G. 155, oenochoë from Cephalus in Cos; and G. 156, *askos* from Capua. Perhaps the most striking of all Greek pictures of negroes is to be found on the Bousiris vase, Ionian, sixth century B.C., Furtwängler-Reichhold *Vasenmalerei*, pl. 51; vol. I, p. 255.

² *B. M. C., Troas, etc.*, pl. XVII; cf. also Roscher, *s.v.* 'Janus,' II, p. 54, who regards the heads not as male and female but as the two types of Dionysus. These coins are, however, a much discussed subject, Wroth regarding them as rather depicting two contrasting beings, male and female, Zeus and Hera (Wroth *Introd. B. M. C. Troas*, p. xlviii) welded into one.

³ *Ann. d. Ist.* XXXII, pl. L. M., p. 332, also Roscher, *s.v.* 'Boreas,' I, p. 809.

⁴ Mayer in the paper cited above (*Ath. Mitt.* XVI, 1891) draws attention to the big teeth of Lamia, the devourer of children, as depicted on the lecythus in Athens.

⁵ A. B. Cook, *Zeus*, I, p. 373 ff.; cf. a Janiform marble bust in the Vatican with heads of bearded, horned Ammon and bearded, wreathed Dionysus, after a fifth century original, Amelung, *Sculpt. Vatic.* I, p. 657, No. 523, pl. 70.

hair and beard, the latter close cropped, and a thin moustache. The third head portrays a negro youth, beardless and with hair like that of the older man. The eyes of all three heads have semi-lunar drilled pupils. Eye-lids and brows are well marked.

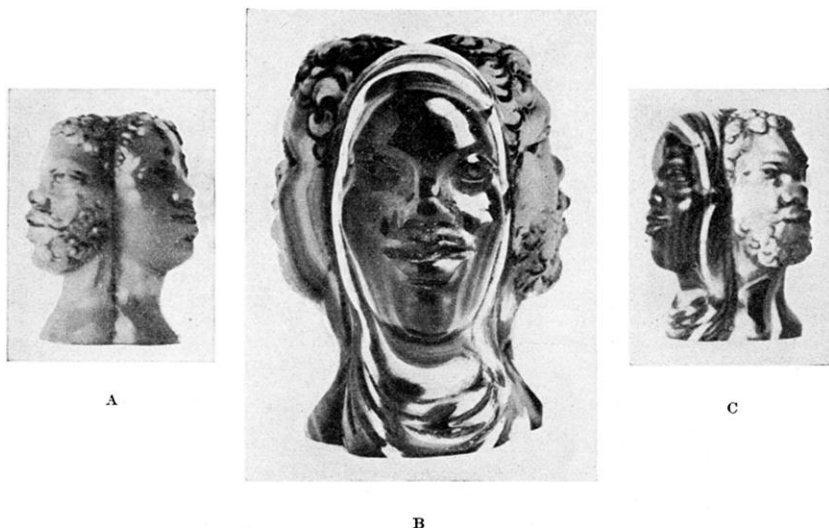


FIGURE 4.—TRICEPHALIC AGATE: A, THE MALE HEADS; B, HEAD OF NEGRESS (ENLARGED); C, BEARDED MALE HEAD AND NEGRESS.

A small vertical shaft has been drilled down the centre of the agate. There is a small chip over the left eye of the negro youth. Purchased in Alexandria.

Two explanations occur to one of the purpose which this agate may have served; either it may be the handle of the lid of some agate casket or vase, such as the *Tazza Farnese*; or it may have been the head of a small sceptre. Figure 5 shows a Roman small bronze coin of the first century of our era (Cohen, VIII, p. 272, 53, wrongly described as "Aelius?") with a bust—probably that of Augustus—mounted upon a short sceptre, and it is conceivable that our stone may have served a similar purpose.¹

Ancient gems carved in the round are of comparatively rare occurrence. According to Furtwängler² they were first produced in the Hellenistic age and were already popular under the

¹ Cf. the sceptre of agate from Curium in Cyprus; Cesnola *Cyprus*, p. 309, fig.

² *Antike Gemmen*, III; pp. 335 ff. and p. 458.

Ptolemies. With the exception of a small figure of Aphrodite wrought in chalcedony the few examples that he mentions are all portraits belonging to the first and second centuries of our era. But Pliny (XXXVII, 8, 108)¹ describes a large statue carved in topaz of Arsinoë, wife of Ptolemy Philadelphus who reigned 285–246 B.C.

I cannot find any record of a gem comparable to the one here published, which appears to be unique both in its form and in its

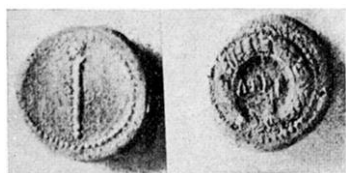


FIGURE 5.—ROMAN BRONZE COIN.

subject of negro portraiture. In seeking to assign a date to such a thing one must be guided more by the work of gem-engravers than by that of sculptors, and one naturally turns for reference to the big cameos produced, as our agate probably was, by Alexandrian artists of the Ptolemaic and Roman periods and copied by the Romans who were fascinated by such gorgeous works of art. Moreover, a comparison of the technique employed in carving the eyes will be one of our surest guides to dating. The eyes on our stone have pupils which are rendered as semi-lunar sinkings which, in the two male heads especially, give the effect of an upward glance. An early Ptolemaic cameo, a sard in Vienna,² with the conjoined busts of Ptolemy Philadelphus and Arsinoë II, has the lower half of both iris and pupil marked by an engraved semi-circular line which gives the eyes an upward glance; while another of Ptolemy Soter³ has drilled pupils, but circular in shape, which give a staring appearance. It is only when we come to the first century of our era that we find on a cameo eyes carved with the pupils rendered as semi-lunar sinkings, and these appear on a large sard (18 x 26 cm.) in the Hague Collection,⁴

¹ In XXXVII, 8, 118, he also describes a statue of Nero made of jasper.

² Furtwängler, *Antike Gemmen*, I, pl. LIII, 1; II, p. 250; III, pp. 155 ff. and Delbrueck, *Antike Porträts*, pl. 58, 15. The latter points out, p. LII, note 1, that a plastic rendering of iris and pupil is the rule on gems even of early date.

³ Furtwängler, *loc. cit.* I, pl. LIX, 3; II, p. 266.

⁴ Furtwängler *loc. cit.* I, pl. LXVI, 1; II, p. 304; Claudius triumphant to right in a car accompanied by Messalina (or Agrippina?), Britannicus, and Octavia; the emperor as Jupiter, his consort as Ceres: a Victory flies to crown them: the car is drawn by two centaurs of whom the foremost carries a trophy and shield and tramples on two crouching captives. The work is somewhat coarse but striking.

one which, if it is of Roman work, is certainly inspired by Alexandrian art. This modelling of the eyes is particularly clear on the heads of Claudius, of Victory, who flies to crown him, and of the two centaurs who are harnessed to the triumphal car. The portrait of Claudius himself and the coiffure of his daughter Octavia fix the date of this large cameo, which must belong to that emperor's reign.

On this analogy, then, I am inclined to place our agate between 50 B.C. and 50 A.D., accounting for its artistic superiority by the supposition that it is the work of an Alexandrian Greek who was a master of his craft, and bearing in mind the fact that a technique which appeared at Rome about 40 A.D. may have been in vogue at Alexandria nearly a century before. The heads are distinguished from other representations of negro heads—with the exception of the fine bronze head in the British Museum¹—by their freedom from caricature and their serious treatment. Consequently this gem can scarcely be a prophylactic, since for such a purpose an ugly thing derives additional merit by added ugliness. Moreover the negress with her graceful veil, reminiscent of the veil on the coins of Arsinoë and of Berenice,² has almost a queenly appearance.

I am indebted to Mr. A. B. Cook³ for the suggestion that conceivably some negro princeling had the gem carved by a Greek artist as a representation of himself and his family. If we carry this hypothesis a step farther a possible explanation suggests itself. It has already been pointed out that the most important of the three heads—the one to which the artist has devoted the greatest care and for which he has selected the best part of the stone—is that of the negress. Is she a negro queen whom the artist has modelled upon the great queens—dead but deified and still worshipped—Arsinoë and Berenice of Egypt? Is she, in fact, the Queen of Meroë accompanied by her consort and her son?

Until recently our information about Meroitic rulers was scanty, gleaned from scattered references in the classics. The

¹ This head—No. 268—is described *B. M. Guide Grk. and Rom. Antiq.* 1908, p. 154, as "portrait head of an African." He is not a pure negro but rather a Libyan with slight negroid characteristics.

² *B. M. C. Ptolemies*, pls. VIII, XIII.

³ I take this opportunity of expressing my thanks to Mr. Cook for much valuable information and assistance.

indigenous population of the country was largely negroid,¹ and upon this population was imposed in the reign of Psammetichus I a ruling caste of Egyptian warriors. Herodotus (II, 29-30) tells a story in which he emphasizes the point that these mutinous soldiers migrated to Meroë with the purpose of finding wives among the natives as well as of settling in the country: Τῶν δὲ τινα λέγεται δείξαντα τὸ αἰδοῖον εἰπεῖν, ἐνθα ἂν τοῦτο ᾗ, ἔσεσθαι αὐτοῖσι ἐνθαῦτα καὶ τέκνα καὶ γυναῖκας. The classical authors give us the names of three rulers of the country: Ergamenes,² king of Meroë, who was brought up in the court of Ptolemy Philadelphus (Diodorus, III, 6); Candace, queen of Meroë, who in 22 B.C. invaded Egypt, and against whom Augustus sent a punitive expedition under Petronius; Candace, queen of Meroë at the time when Nero sent a mission to discover the source of the Nile (Strabo, XVII, 1, 54: Dion Cass., LIV, 5, 4-6: Pliny, *H. N.*, VI, 29, 181-186), probably the same queen³ whose eunuch was converted to Christianity by Philip (Acts, VIII, 27). Strabo tells us that the people of Meroë were governed by a queen (XVI, 4, 8, βασιλεύονται δ' ὑπὸ γυναικός, ὅφ' ἦν ἐστὶ καὶ ἡ Μερὴ) and it has been presumed that these queens all bore the title of Candace.

A great advance in our knowledge of this offshoot of Egyptian civilization has, however, been made by the discoveries of Professor Garstang in 1910 which are so ably set out in his book *Meroë, the City of the Ethiopians*, and his work confirms and amplifies what has been recorded by Dr. Wallis Budge in his *Egyptian Sudan*.

Various opinions have been expressed⁴ as to the prevalence of negro blood in the race of the kings and queens of Meroë, but a glance at the illustrations of some of these personages⁵ is sufficient

¹ Erman (transl. Tirard), *Life in Ancient Egypt*, 1894, p. 501; and Wallis Budge, *Egyptian Sudan*, 1907, II, p. 413.

² Ark-Amon on the monuments; Garstang, *Meroë the City of the Ethiopians*, p. 4.

³ *Op. cit.* Introd., p. 3.

⁴ Garstang himself expresses no opinion as to the negroid characteristics of the Meroites, but his co-author, Professor Sayce, believes (*op. cit.* Introd., p. 4) that the monuments prove definitely that the Ethiopians had no negro blood in their veins, disagreeing with Dr. Budge, who calls the same monuments to witness that strong negroid characteristics do appear in the faces and figures of many of the kings and queens of Meroë (*Egyptian Sudan*, I, pp. 407, 411; II, p. 135).

⁵ Budge, *op. cit.* I, pp. 375, 403, 409; II, pp. 121, 125, 127.

to convince one that negroid characteristics are by no means rare. Generally speaking these traits are much more marked in the women, who often appear as steatopygous negresses dressed in Egyptian garb, while the men of the ruling caste are at times thick-lipped and woolly-haired, and at times resemble their Egyptian ancestors. In this we have surely a strong confirmation of Herodotus' pointed story about the mutinous soldiers of Psammetichus I. Painted monuments were lacking before 1910, but a most important discovery of Garstang's in the temple of Isis at Meroë—a discovery the interest of which seems, in this connection to have escaped his notice—once again confirms Herodotus. Garstang found two great columnar statues of an Ethiopian king and queen,¹ the former painted red, the latter black.

Meroitic art is an echo of the conventional hieratic art of Egypt which regularly paints the flesh of men red and the flesh of women pale yellow. Yet here we have the king painted red like any male Egyptian, and the queen black like a negress. Her head too, which is illustrated in *Meroë*, pl. XVIII, 3, is, though conventionalized, clearly that of a negress with high cheek-bones and thick lips.

The question now arises whether it is possible to identify our negro queen carved in agate with any Meroitic queen depicted on the monuments: and here we may pause to note four points about this agate; first, that the heads—and particularly that of the queen—are negroid; secondly, that the king is a bearded negro; thirdly, that the young "prince" is beardless; and lastly the curious shape of the three-headed gem suggesting some triple-headed deity.

Figure 6 shows the heads of four personages² carved, in the order in which they are here printed, on the west wall of the temple of the Lion-god (Temple A) at Naga in the "island of Meroë." Allowing for the difference between Meroitic art—an offshoot of late Egyptian—and Greek art of the first centuries before and after Christ, it would seem that these four figures may well be compared with our gem.

¹ Garstang, *Meroë*, pl. XVIII, 1, 2, 3, p. 19. The queen is now in the Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh, and Mr. Curle, the Director, informs me that she is painted black, with traces of red pigment on the armlets and the undergarment.

² After Lepsius, *Denkm.*, Abth. v, Bl. 59, and Budge, *op. cit.* II, Plate facing p. 144. The Lion-god's name was Apezemak; cf. Garstang, *op. cit.* p. 63.

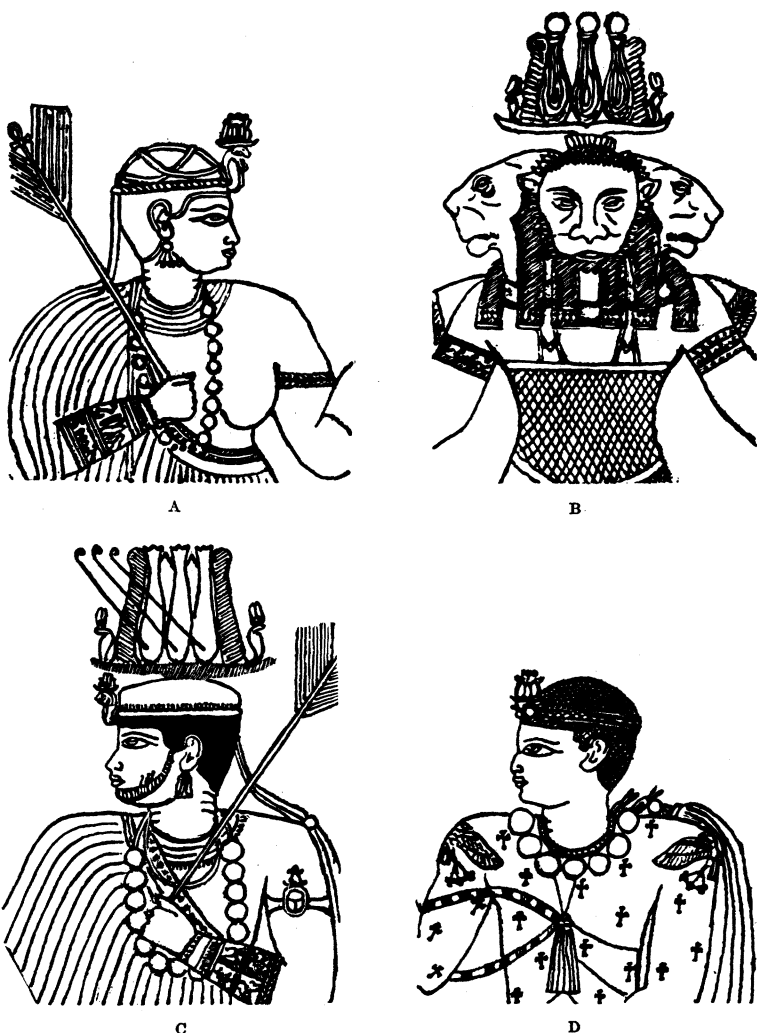


FIGURE 6.—RELIEFS FROM TEMPLE A AT NAGA (MEROË): A, QUEEN; B, LION-GOD; C, KING; D, PRINCE.

The queen (Fig. 6, A) on the temple at Naga wears the headdress of the queen of Egypt. The Greek gem-engraver was most familiar with the headdress of the queen of Egypt as worn by the descendants of Arsinoë—the flowing veil. The queen at Naga, thickset and large-hipped,¹ is a negress as she is on the agate.

¹ Cf. other reliefs portraying her figure, Budge, *op. cit.* II, pp. 125, 127.

The king (Fig. 6, c) "is clearly of negro origin" (Budge, *loc. cit.* II, p. 134) and is bearded like the king on our agate. The "prince," (Fig. 6, d) on this and other monuments of the same Meroitic dynasty, is the regular companion of the queen and king as he is on our agate.¹

Most remarkable of all, however, it is to find these three royal personages worshipping a three-headed deity (Fig. 6, b)—the Lion-god of the Meroites whose other temple was excavated in 1910. In ancient Egypt the king was an incarnation of the deity, and this belief prevailed in Meroë with even greater force than in Egypt, Diodorus (III, 5; *τοῦτον τὸ πλῆθος αἰρεῖται βασιλέα· εἰθὺς δὲ καὶ προσκυνεῖ καὶ τιμᾷ καθάπερ θεόν*) making a special reference to the worship of the royal house by the Ethiopians. On a temple at Messawrat—of later date than temple A at Naga from which the reliefs come—is a set of curious carvings depicting in three cases leonine monsters, and in one case a winged lioness, toying with prostrate captives. "In these scenes the lion probably typifies the king. . . . The lioness probably symbolizes the queen" (Budge, *loc. cit.* II, pp. 149–150). Obviously the chief members of the royal house were thought of as incarnations of the three-headed Lion-god, and the artist has conveyed this idea in the agate.

According to the latest readings of the hieroglyphics the three personages on the temple are Queen Amanitêre, King Natikamani, and prince (?) Arik-kharêr.² Probably all the queens who bore this name also bore the name of Candace; while the Amanitêre of the temple has been identified with the Candace who rebelled against Augustus in 22 B.C.³ But for the fact that Meroë was not in so flourishing a condition in the first century of our era that great temples would be erected, she might almost as well be identified with the Candace⁴ whom Nero's

¹ Griffiths (Garstang, *Meroë*, p. 61) remarks upon this curious circumstance, "It would be interesting to know why a third personage is so often represented along with the king and queen on Meroitic temples. . . . Some considerations point to his being the son and heir of the king, while it would be reasonable also to suggest that he is an eponymous prince or priest distinguishing the members of a dynasty of homonymous kings and queens like the Ptolemies and Cleopatras of Egypt."

² Garstang, *op. cit.* p. 61. The same royal names appear on inscriptions at Wad-Ben-Naga, Amâra, Naga, Meroë, and in one of the pyramids.

³ Budge, *op. cit.* II, p. 169.

⁴ One of these two Candaces may, in Prof. Sayce's opinion, be identified with the Kantakit buried in one of the pyramids of Meroë.

Commissioners visited and who is mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles.

Whether she be the Candace of 22 B.C. or of 54 A.D., our agate seems to depict the same queen—accompanied by King Nati-kamani and by Arik-kharêr—as she who is carved on the temple at Naga. A Graeco-Egyptian gem-engraver¹ has shown his skill in portraying her black, like the black queen found in the temple of Isis at Meroë, while the gem has a curious connection with the local religion in that the artist has suggested the three-headed Lion-god in his treatment of the three royalties who impersonate the god on earth.

Whichever of the two historical Candaces this negro queen may be, she forms an effective contrast to the hideous negress, Lamia, on our Attic fifth-century oenochoë.

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¹ A cameo was discovered by Garstang, near the sanctuary of Amon at Meroë, made of glass paste (*Meroë*, pl. X, 3); also a Graeco-Roman bronze statuette of Eros (pl. XVIII, 5).